

***Principia Ethica* Re-examined: The Ethics of a Proto-logical Atomism**

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I

One of the questions that any future history of British moral philosophy in the twentieth century should investigate and document is how it came about that Moore's *Principia Ethica* was appropriated by what we can call the Humean tradition of moral philosophy.¹ I shall not trace that development now but only argue that there was no excuse or justification for it.

That evaluative words and expressions do not conform to the pattern of descriptive expressions has been noted in one way or other by practically all philosophers writing on morals ever since Plato.

Moore, in order to refer to a special doctrine of his own, coined a perhaps unfortunate, but very handy term: the Naturalistic Fallacy. This expression proved to be so handy that moral philosophers after him took it over to refer to the family of problems peculiar to evaluative language, to a family of problems that had no common name until our time. Owing to this misuse of the expression 'Naturalistic Fallacy', when we go back now to read the *Principia*, our mind is preconditioned to find there something which is not there, or to regard what *is* there as an old-fashioned expression of what we *now* regard as the Naturalistic Fallacy.

That the problems peculiar to evaluative language have not received a common name until this century is not at all surprising, for there is not *one* problem to be referred to, but a whole family of problems. I shall call these problems 'evaluative errors', and I shall use the term 'Naturalistic Fallacy' strictly only to refer to Moore's doctrine, as he intended to use this term.

It is not my intention to argue whether the Naturalistic Fallacy is a fallacy or not, or what this 'Fallacy' should be, nor to decide what these evaluative errors are. I am not going to break new ground in the field of evaluative language, but to investigate *Principia Ethica* as if we were

¹ Hume himself has equally been appropriated by contemporary British moral philosophy. But however inaccurately the tag 'Hume on "is" and "ought"' is used, it does identify the tradition that uses this tag.

reading it for the first time, without any preconceived ideas as to what the Naturalistic Fallacy ought to be.

If we use as our paradigm, in the Kuhnian sense of this term, the set of problems to which the notion of Naturalistic Fallacy has been assimilated by more recent moral philosophy, then in reading the *Principia* we constantly come across unexplainable odd arguments, irritating passages that do not fit into our paradigm. Such a reading of the *Principia* misses the whole point of the book and can only regard even the very formulation of the Naturalistic Fallacy as an inadequate formulation of that fallacy. All these oddities lead us to take up a rather patronizing attitude to Moore, attributing to him an important discovery that he himself did not know how to express.

If however we take as our paradigm Moore's ontology that he developed in his criticism of Bradley, especially in his 1898 paper on 'The Nature of Judgment', and as his ontology and terminology continued to develop and change slightly at the beginning of this century, then most of what used to look odd and out of place will become intelligible and will acquire meaning and significance. To be sure, there will still be perplexities in reading the *Principia*, but these perplexities can have quite natural explanations which fit into our reading of the *Principia*. One is the fact I have just mentioned, namely that Moore's thinking about his ontology and the terminology in which he expressed it was changing slightly during these years. An obvious example of this is that in place of the term 'concept' he talks in the *Principia* of 'that object or idea' that we have before our mind, or of 'simple object of thought' or of 'notion' or 'quality'. The only place where I find him still using the term 'concept' in the *Principia* is in the Preface where he claims that Brentano appears to agree with him 'in regarding all ethical propositions as defined by the fact that they predicate a single unique objective concept'.² Interestingly, in his review of Brentano in the same year, he writes that 'we are immediately aware that "true" and "rightly believed" are two distinct concepts, one of which, "true", is an unanalyzable property belonging to some objects of belief'.³ The slightly changed terminology of the *Principia*, however, expresses the same ontology.

We must also keep in mind that in the *Principia* Moore's aim was not to expound his ontology, but to make what he believed to be a revolutionary break with both the idealist and the nineteenth century utilitarian moral tradition in favour of a more noble and elevated utilitarianism, just as revolutionary as his earlier break with idealist logic and ontology. He formulated this break with the help of his new ontology, and although in

² *Principia Ethica*, p. xi. For ease of reference I shall put further page references to *Principia Ethica* and to 'The Nature of Judgment' (*Mind*, 1899) into the text, abbreviating the references to P.E. and N.J. respectively.

³ *International Journal of Ethics* (1903), 117.

the *Principia* he does not argue for it, what he thought to be his revolutionary move in ethics presupposes it and is inseparable from it.

What one especially would have liked to see from a fresh explanation of his ontology in the *Principia* are (a) an explanation of how the newly-introduced indefinable atomic object of thought *good* is related to other indefinable atomic objects of thought or concepts such as *existence* and *truth* that we are familiar with from 'The Nature of Judgment', and (b) how the distinction between empirical concepts, those that exist in time, those which are related to the concept of *existence* in 'The Nature of Judgment', and those that have being in some other sense, coincide with the distinction between natural and non-natural properties or objects in the *Principia*. The change from the distinction between what exists in time and what has being in some other sense to the distinction between natural and non-natural qualities or objects is another terminological change in the *Principia* without a change in ontology.⁴

As it is, Moore introduced his indefinable object of thought *good* without any qualifications as another object on a par with other objects in his ontology. As we shall see he even explicitly rejects the view that it might be an object of will and not of cognition, by regarding its status as a problem of epistemology.

II

There is indeed one superficial similarity between Moore and Hume but this similarity is rather ironical. As I have said elsewhere, both Hume and Moore thought that certain value terms *are like* colour words.⁵ However, the similarity ends here because they thought they were like colour words for diametrically opposed reasons. Hume thought that virtue and vice are like colours, sounds, heat and cold, which according to 'modern philosophy' are not part of the furniture of the world but are our contribution to the description of what the world is like, and G. E. Moore thought that his little indefinable good is like yellow, because, like innumerable other simple objects, it is part of the basic furniture of the world.

The two claims that are most important for Moore both in his 'The Nature of Judgment' and in his *Principia* are that the objects of our thoughts have a being independent of our mental states and that the basic constituents of what has such an independent objective being are atomistic. He calls these atomistic constituents of the world 'concepts' or 'meanings'

⁴ I would like to mention here how much I learnt from discussions on these problems with Mrs Shasta Dawson.

⁵ See my 'Against the Ritual of "Is" and "Ought"', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* III (1978), 6.

in 'The Nature of Judgment', and 'notions' or 'object or idea' in the *Principia*. In spite of this terminology, these concepts are not formed or abstracted, nor are they in any other way dependent on our mind. They are found, discovered or intuited, but their being in no way depends on their being known or discovered. What applies to what is known also applies in the *Principia* to what is desired or willed or commanded. There is an interesting passage where Moore draws an explicit parallel in this respect between the independence from a mental state of what is known and what is willed. Out of many passages I refer to this one partly because it is convenient for Moore himself to draw the parallel, and partly because the context is Moore's argument against a simplified Kant, in so far as Kant's views are shared by modern prescriptivists; and it is the prescriptivists who are the worst offenders in misreading Moore. My concern here however is not to argue against the prescriptivists by pointing out that they commit what Moore thought to be the Naturalistic Fallacy, except in so far as they invoke Moore's name in vain as their authority. There can be other arguments for prescriptivism and there can be good arguments against Moore's views. In fact if my reading of the *Principia* is right, an argument *for* prescriptivism should involve an argument *against* Moore. But my main concern is to outline pointers to the proper reading of the *Principia*.

'... Kant also commits the fallacy'—says Moore—'of supposing that "This ought to be" means "This is commanded". He conceives the Moral Law to be an Imperative. And this is a very common mistake' (*P.E.*, pp. 127–128). Then further on he goes on to say:

But this assumption seems to owe its plausibility, not so much to the supposition that 'ought' expresses a 'command', as to a far more fundamental error. This error consists in supposing that to ascribe certain predicates to a thing is the same thing as to say that that thing is the object of a certain kind of psychical state. It is supposed that to say that a thing is real or true is the same thing as to say that it is known in a certain way; and that the difference between the assertion that it is good and the assertion that it is real—between an ethical, therefore, and a metaphysical proposition—*consists* in the fact that whereas the latter asserts its relation to Cognition the former asserts its relation to Will.

Now that this is an error has been already shewn in Chapter I. ... nor can I add anything to that proof (*P.E.*, pp. 128–129).

To show this to be an error was already one of Moore's main preoccupations in 'The Nature of Judgment'.

For similar reasons he also claims that propositions in no way depend on, or have reference to, the world. In opposition to Bradley, Moore argues that the truth of a proposition does not depend on its relation to the world: 'a proposition is constituted by any number of concepts, together with a specific relation between them; and according to the nature of this relation

the proposition may be true or false. What kind of relation makes a proposition true or false, cannot be further defined, but must be immediately recognized' (N.J., p. 180).

We cannot stop yet to compare this with what Moore has to say about the concept *good* in the *Principia*. First we have to go on briefly to see why truth cannot consist in the correspondence of a proposition with reality. In a sense there *is* no reality more ultimate than the world of concepts. 'A concept is not in any intelligible sense an "adjective", as if there were something substantive, more ultimate than it. For we must, if we are to be consistent, describe what appears to be most substantive as no more than a collection of such supposed adjectives: and thus, in the end, the concept turns out to be the only substantive or subject, and no one concept either more or less an adjective than any other' (N.J., p. 192-193). In this world of equal concepts some concepts combine with or are related to the concept of existence. Such combinations of concepts do not thereby become ontologically more fundamental or more substantive. Existence itself is a concept.

One of Moore's examples is the proposition 'This paper exists'. If this is true, 'it means only that the concepts, which are combined in specific relations in the concept of this paper, are also combined in a specific manner with the concept existence. That specific manner is something immediately known, like red or two' (N.J., pp. 180-181).

Four years later Moore will add, in the same manner, not to red and two, but to yellow and two, the concept of good. In the *Principia* when we talk about *that* which is good, the proposition 'this complex is good' if it is true, means only that the concepts, which are combined in specific relations in an organic whole, are also related in a specific manner to the concept good, and this is immediately known like yellow or two.

Moore's world of propositions, which comprises his ontology, consists of ultimately simple unanalysable concepts of equal ontological status. These propositions are independent of any minds or of psychic states, they do not depend on being stated or asserted or willed or desired. Nor is their truth or falsity dependent on a relationship to some world to which they might or might not correspond, for there is no other world 'beyond' them to which they can be related. What exists is only a subclass of propositions, all of which, even when they do not *exist* in space and time, even when they cannot be picked up and moved about, have a being. That subclass is the class to which the concept of existence is related. It seems that the concept of existence itself does not *exist* but this does not mean that it has not got the same ontological status or being as whatever does exist, that is, to whatever it is related, it only means that it is not related to itself.

It is into this world that Moore introduced that 'object or idea' that the word 'good' 'stands for'. 'By what name we call this unique object is a

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matter of indifference, so long as we clearly recognize what it is and that it does differ from other objects' (*P.E.*, p. 21).

Over and over again Moore rejects the investigation of the proper *use* of words. He regards these as verbal questions, 'properly left to writers of dictionaries and other people interested in literature' (*P.E.*, p. 2). 'My business is not with its ["good" 's] proper usage, as established by custom . . . My business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea . . .' (*P.E.*, p. 6).

What Moore discovered about the nature of this object is that of the two sets of alternatives (a) good is not a complex but a simple object, that is, it is unlike a horse and like yellow, and (b) of the ontologically equal objects of thoughts it does not belong to that subclass which exist in space and time, that is, in this respect, it is more like the number two than yellow.

(a) It is because good is a simple object that it is incapable of definition in what he regards as the most important sense of definition.

The most important sense of 'definition' is that in which a definition states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole; and in this sense 'good' has no definition because it is simple and has no parts. It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever *is* capable of definition must be defined . . . There are many other instances of such qualities (*P.E.*, pp. 9–10).

Definitions of the kind Moore is asking for are possible only when the object in question is complex in the logical atomist's sense of 'complex'. A horse or a chimaera can be defined for they are composed of parts (*P.E.*, p. 7). 'But yellow and good, we say, are not complex: they are notions of that simple kind, out of which definitions are composed and with which the power of further defining ceases' (*P.E.*, p. 8). As he says in 'The Nature of Judgment', 'a thing becomes intelligible first when it is analysed into its constituent concepts' (p. 182).

Incidentally, it can often be instructive to note the recurrence of a philosopher's examples, to make use of what one could call the archaeology of philosophical examples. On p. 179 of 'The Nature of Judgment' Moore uses two examples: 'This rose is red' and 'This chimaera has three heads'. Of them he says: 'What I am asserting is a specific connection of certain concepts forming the total concept "rose" with the concepts "this" and "now" and "red" . . . Similarly when I say "this chimaera has three heads", the chimaera is not an idea in my mind, nor any part of such idea. What I mean to assert is nothing about mental states, but a specific connection of concepts.' The recurrence of a chimaera in the *Principia* as an example of a complex object should be an indication of where to look for the context of

its significance. And one does not need to be a very subtle archaeologist of philosophical examples to recognize a few pages later the example 'this orange is yellow'.

We shall see later that in a different context Moore can give definitions of a different kind as well, definitions which tell us how a word is or should be used. But when he argues for the impossibility of defining *good* he does not talk about our use of the word; he argues that the object good is a simple object in the world. If we wanted to give a complete enumeration of all that there is in his world 'out there', we should mention good beside yellow and red and beside the four legs and the livers of horses and the goat's head growing from the middle of the back of a chimaera. He argued for the possibility of Ethics against a logical atomist type of denial of its possibility, against a type of theory which might say that *in* the world there are no values, *not* by changing such a type of theory of language, but by adding another object to the content of such a world. 'Good' is meaningful not because words may have other functions beside standing for atomic simples, but because there is also a logically simple object to which the word 'good' refers. 'Good' is meaningful for the same reason and in the same way as 'yellow' is meaningful. The following passage states the essence of what I want to call proto-logical atomism.

In fact, if it is not the case that 'good' denotes something simple and undefinable, only two alternatives are possible: either it is a complex, a given whole, about the correct analysis of which there may be disagreement; or else it means nothing at all, and there is no such subject as Ethics (*P.E.*, p. 15).

Moore at this time seems to have operated with an ontology and theory of language which later became fully developed in logical atomism. In the very last sentences of 'The Nature of Judgment' Moore says: 'From our description of a judgment, there must, then, disappear all reference either to our mind or to the world. Neither of these can furnish "ground" for anything, save in so far as they are complex judgments. The nature of the judgment is more ultimate than either, and less ultimate only than the nature of its constituents—the nature of the concept or logical idea' (p. 193). As the term 'logical idea-ism' sounds uncouth I prefer the term 'proto-logical atomism' at the risk of being somewhat anachronistic.

Moore did not argue for the possibility of Ethics by rejecting an ontology and theory of language according to which 'good' either denotes a simple or a complex or is meaningless. Rather he made room for Ethics *by increasing the number of objects in the universe by one*. 'By what name we call this object is a matter of indifference, so long as we clearly recognize what it is and that it does differ from other objects' (*P.E.*, p. 21).

(b) Moore's famous method of showing that good differs from other objects is not used by him to show that we can ask an evaluative question

of almost anything we describe; and that as soon as we use an evaluative word or expression as if it would merely describe, we could then ask an evaluative question about that description in turn. 'Even if it were a natural object, that would not alter the nature of the fallacy, nor diminish its importance a whit.' In fact good is a non-natural object, but what Moore intends to show is that good differs from other objects *on the same level*. One can see from the examples he uses that he is arguing against a Bradleyan theory of judgment. If when I say 'I am pleased' I meant that 'I' was exactly the same thing as 'pleased' it would be the same fallacy (p. 13). Or if by judging an orange both yellow and sweet we would think that 'yellow' means 'sweet' it would again be the same fallacy (p. 14).

Moore is preoccupied by the nature of judgment, not by the nature of value; he is interested in the distinctness of the constituents of judgments, not in the distinctness of value judgments. Any confusion of any atomic simple with any other would amount to the fallacy but Moore is not really as clear on this or other vital matters as his style or reputation for clearness would suggest. One often gets the impression that the further distinction between natural and non-natural objects is parallel to the distinction between the subclasses of existents and the rest of objects that have being; and the naturalistic fallacy is a subclass of the fallacies that confuse any logical simple objects, that subclass in which one confuses an object which has being with one that exists.

But the overall impression I get in reading the *Principia* is that Moore's two-pronged argument in 'The Nature of Judgment' against those who think that either the empirical world or the mind is more ultimate than propositions—the two-pronged argument he summed up in the last few sentences of the article that I quoted above—is the foundation of the naturalistic fallacy. Pages 124 and 125 of the *Principia* are very instructive in this respect for there he brings his two arguments together when he brings together his objections to the empiricists and the metaphysicians.

The paradigm statements of empiricists are statements where 'the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate stand for something that exists'. The metaphysicians 'still think you must mean, somehow or other, that something does exist, since this is what you generally mean when you say anything . . . Every truth, they think, must mean somehow that something exists; and since, unlike the empiricists, they recognize some truths which do not mean that anything exists here and now, these they think must mean that something exists *not* here and now.'

What Moore is trying to object to here can be misleading for two connected reasons. One is that one would have thought Moore himself was at pains to say the sort of thing he is here and elsewhere accusing the metaphysicians of doing, namely of asserting that propositions have some sort of existence other than empirical existence. But what Moore is objecting to is not the assertion of the type of being he attributes to all his concepts that

comprises his world of propositions. He is objecting to the postulation of an existence, empirical or otherwise, to which propositions could be related in order to qualify as true or false.

Not realizing or fully understanding what Moore means by existential propositions, when he claims that Ethical truths do not conform to this type, some philosophers might misunderstand him as saying that moral judgments do not conform to descriptive statements. There could be nothing further from Moore's mind here as throughout the *Principia*. He is labouring the point here, as elsewhere, that good, like many other objects, though being on the same ontological level, is different from objects that exist in space and time. In the passage we are considering Moore complains: 'But philosophers suppose that the reason why we cannot take goodness up and move it about, is not that it is a different *kind* of object from any which can be moved about . . .' (Moore's italics).

Although the empiricists are really the naturalistic philosophers, the metaphysicians, as we saw, 'still think you must mean, somehow or other, that something does exist . . .' 'They are as unable as the empiricists to imagine that you can ever mean that $2 + 2 = 4$.' After rejecting the empiricists' account of $2 + 2 = 4$ in exactly the same way as he does on page 180 of 'The Nature of Judgment' he goes on to say that the metaphysicians 'have no better account of its meaning to give than either, with Leibniz, that God's mind is in a certain state, or, with Kant, that your mind is in a certain state, or finally, with Mr Bradley, that something is in a certain state. Here, then, we have the root of the naturalistic fallacy.'

This root of the naturalistic fallacy is what we find in the last few lines of 'The Nature of Judgment' in which he sums up that article. But let us turn now to see what ethical theory Moore presents to us in the *Principia*.

III

The recognition of the simple unanalysable object is only the first step for Moore in building up his Ethics. His main object is to find *that* which is good, to find *the* good. 'It is because I think there will be less risk of error in our search for a definition of "the good" that I am now insisting that *good* is indefinable' (p. 9).

The good is that to which good is attached. When Moore says that good belongs to a thing he does not mean that it is predicated of a thing or that we judge the thing to be good. His language clearly indicates that he is talking about two *objects* being related to each other when we say 'x is good'. He had the vocabulary to express himself otherwise if he had wanted to. At the top of page 9 he can talk about the 'substantive to which the adjective "good" will *apply*' (italics mine). At the bottom of the page he explicitly speaks in a different language: "'Good" then, if we mean by it that quality

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which we assert to *belong* to a thing, when we say that the thing is good . . .’ (italics mine).

We separate and recognize this unique object, so that we may be able to find the good, by finding out to what thing or things this unique object belongs.

A natural quality may or may not belong to a thing; natural qualities enter into contingent relations with things and with each other. But ‘good’, being a non-natural quality, is ‘a different *kind* of object from any which can be moved about’ (*P.E.*, p. 124). *The good* then, if it is good at all, if this unique object is attached to it at all, must be such that this unique object is always and necessarily attached to it. ‘“The good”, “that which is good” must therefore be the substantive to which the adjective “good” will apply: it must be the whole of that to which the adjective will apply, and the adjective must *always* truly apply to it’ (*P.E.*, p. 9).

It happens very seldom that our simple unanalysable object is attached to or belongs to something. As we learn in the last chapter of the *Principia*, it happens only in two cases, in the case of certain aesthetic experiences and in the case of friendship. There is no other instance of the presence of this unique object. When we judge an action or a motive or a human character to be good, this unanalysable non-natural quality is not at all present in that action, motive or character. And still, the word ‘good’ in these judgments does *refer* to this non-natural quality. In fact ‘words which are commonly taken as the signs of ethical judgments all do refer to it; and they are expressions of ethical judgments solely because they do so refer’ (*P.E.*, p. 21). This sounds very puzzling indeed: there is an object which belongs to a thing *only* when it always belongs to it, and this happens only in two cases; and still all the words that are commonly taken as signs of ethical judgments refer to this object.

The solution of this apparent puzzle is that Moore uses the word ‘refer’ in just as strange a way as he is using words such as ‘definition’, ‘object’, etc.:

Although all such judgments do refer to that unique notion which I have called ‘good’, they do not all refer to it in the same way. They may either assert that this unique property does always attach to the thing in question, or else they may assert that the thing in question is *a cause or necessary condition* for the existence of other things to which this unique property does attach (*P.E.*, p. 21).

Whenever we make a value judgment we always refer to this simple object. But we may refer to it in two different ways, and two ways only. If this simple object is always attached to a thing, we refer to this object directly by judging such a thing to be good. The only other way of referring to this object, and the only other possible use of value words is to state that the result of this action is such a thing to which this simple object is

attached. 'To praise a thing is to assert either that it is good in itself or else that it is a means to good' (*P.E.*, p. 171). What we ought to do 'introduces into Ethics . . . an entirely new question—the question what things are related as *causes* to that which is good in itself . . . Every judgment in practical Ethics may be reduced to the form: this is a cause of that good thing' (*P.E.*, p. 146). 'What is "right" or what is our "duty" must in any case be defined as what is a means to good . . .' (*P.E.*, p. 167). 'So far as definition goes, to call a thing a virtue is merely to declare that it is a means to good' (*P.E.*, p. 173).

Evaluative errors can be committed by giving definitions of this sort, and on the other hand we are not saved from evaluative errors by not giving definitions of the sort that Moore regarded as the most important sense of definition.

Whenever I say 'X ought to be', I mean—according to Moore—that a simple object is attached to X. Whenever I say 'I ought to do this' or 'This action is good', I mean that the end result of this action is such a thing to which a simple object is attached. All value words refer to this object ('by what name we call this unique object is a matter of indifference') in one way or another, and this reference is the criterion of their being value words. By the strict rules Moore laid down we are prevented from making any other evaluations, or rather we are prevented from making evaluations at all.

It is not even the case that when we judge an action to be good that action will be good in so far as it is the cause of that which is good in itself. For what possible meaning could the phrase 'good in so far as . . .' have? Can I mean by this 'good' that the action has that unique object attached to it? Clearly not. The only other possible use of 'good' is to say that this action is the *cause* of that to which this object *is* attached. So to say that 'This action is good in so far as it is the cause of that which is good in itself' is to say—according to Moore—that 'This action is the cause in so far as it is the cause of that which is good in itself.' And to say that 'This is good in itself' is to make a descriptive judgment about the necessary connection between an unanalysable object and a complex analysable thing.

One can hardly think of any other moral philosopher who would invite us to make such evaluative errors as Moore would want us to make. First he claims that 'good' is the name of a simple object. Then in effect, he defines all our value words and expressions by giving very strict rules for their use. These evaluative errors are called nowadays naturalistic fallacies.

IV

Moore sets the stage for the whole of his ethics in the Preface of his *Principia*. There he distinguishes between two questions, as the most

important distinction in Ethics. 'These two questions may be expressed, the first in the form: What kind of things ought to exist for their own sakes? the second in the form: What kind of actions ought we to perform? I have tried to show exactly what it is that we ask about a thing, when we ask whether it ought to exist for its own sake, is good in itself or has intrinsic value; and exactly what it is that we ask about an action, when we ask whether we ought to do it, whether it is a right action or duty' (*P.E.*, p. viii).

We must notice first of all that these two questions separate 'things' from 'actions', and so whatever Moore will say about the nature of each of these questions, one will apply only to things, the other only to actions.

Then Moore goes on to say what kind of evidence or reasons are relevant as arguments for or against any answer to these questions.

For answers to the *first* question, no relevant evidence can be adduced at all, we know what is good in itself, only by intuition.

In order to be able to answer the second question, 'evidence must contain propositions of two kinds and of two kinds only: it must consist, in the first place, of truth with regard to the results of the action in question—of *causal* truth—but it must *also* contain ethical truth of our first or self-evident class' (*P.E.*, p. ix).

By now we can recognize where this will lead us. *The good*, that which is good, will be the answer to the first question. When we answer the second question, our judgment will refer to *the good* via a causal relation. And since, according to Moore, we cannot have certain knowledge about a causal claim, we cannot say about any action whether it is or is not always good. Hence actions cannot qualify for that which is always good.

The whole of *Principia* can be regarded as an elaboration and explanation of the difference between these two questions distinguished in the Preface. Moore, besides explaining his own theory, argues against two main types of ethical theories, both of which are fallacious because they do not recognize the different natures of these two questions. These two types of theories are: (a) 'The Intuitionists proper' (by this Moore means other intuitionists than himself and Sidgwick) and (b) theories based on the Naturalistic Fallacy.

(a) 'The Intuitionist proper is distinguished by maintaining that propositions of my *second* class—propositions which assert that a certain action is *right* or a *duty*—are incapable of proof or disproof by any enquiry into the results of such actions. I, on the contrary, am no less anxious to maintain that propositions of *this* kind are *not* "Intuitions", than to maintain that propositions of my *first* class *are* Intuitions' (*P.E.*, p. x).

There is all the difference between Prichard's and Moore's intuitionism, without any similarities between them. Moore is doing what Prichard says we should not do: Moore intuits a self-evident first principle of morality from which every other moral judgment can be deduced. 'The Intuitional

view of Ethics consists in the supposition that certain rules, stating that certain actions are always to be done or to be omitted may be taken as self-evident premisses. I have shown with regard to judgments of what is *good in itself*, that this is the case' (*P.E.*, p. 148). Of course intuitionists like Prichard would not claim that when they intuit an obligation they regard it as a premiss, but the quotation clearly indicates that Moore does regard *the good* as a premiss from which all other value judgments follow.

According to Prichard whenever we have to decide whether we should do an act or not, first we have to take into account all the relevant facts, and then we just see whether we ought to do the act or not, and there is no more to it. There is no more question why I ought to do it. Moore on the other hand is looking for the first principles of morality, and he intuits these first principles, for the 'fundamental principles of Ethics must be self-evident' (*P.E.*, p. 143). In the case of Prichard we always have to use intuition, all through our life, whenever we are confronted with a moral decision. But according to Moore, we may settle by intuition what thing or things are good in themselves once and for all, sitting in our armchair. For the rest of our life then, we have to use induction and investigate causal connections whenever we are confronted with a moral decision.

I hope it is evident from Moore's language and system that it is not the simple unanalysable quality that we intuit; we intuit only that it is attached to something (or, what it is attached to).

(b) While the Intuitionists overemphasize the role of intuition in Ethics—according to Moore—theories that commit the Naturalistic Fallacy ignore intuitions altogether.

Moore goes into battle with the Naturalistic theories over the question what *the good* is, what is good in itself. No argument is relevant to show what *the good* is, and still moral philosophers tried to adduce proofs or arguments to establish their conclusions to this effect. So these arguments must either be irrelevant, or, if they seem relevant, involve a definition somewhere.

Moore discusses Bentham's theory in paragraph 14 as the first illustration of the Naturalistic Fallacy. Bentham seems to imply that the word 'right' means 'conducive to general happiness'. 'This by itself need not necessarily involve the naturalistic fallacy.' The word 'right' can be appropriated to actions that are means to the ideal. 'This use of "right" as denoting what is good as a means . . . is indeed the use to which I shall confine the word.' But first Bentham should have 'laid down as an axiom, that general happiness was *the good*, or (what is equivalent to this) that general happiness alone was good'. In this case 'it might be perfectly consistent for him to *define* right as "conducive to the general happiness" '. But Bentham by saying that the greatest happiness is the right end of human actions, 'applies the word "right" . . . to the end, as such, not only to the means which are conducive to it; and, that being so, right can no

longer be defined as “conducive to the general happiness” without involving the fallacy in question’.

What worries Moore, however, is not that defining the word ‘right’ takes away its evaluative force. The fallacy consists in the reasoning adduced to show what *the* good is; whereas it should be laid down what *the* good is ‘as an axiom’.

‘I do not wish the importance I assign to this fallacy to be misunderstood. The discovery of it does not at all refute Bentham’s contention that greatest happiness is the proper end of human action . . .’, provided that this is an intuition and is regarded as an ethical principle. ‘That principle must be true all the same . . . What I am maintaining is that the reasons which he actually gives for his ethical proposition are fallacious ones so far as they consist in a definition of right’ (*P.E.*, p. 19).

The value of avoiding the naturalistic fallacy is that ‘if . . . we once recognize that we must start our Ethics without a definition, we shall be much more apt to look about us, before we adopt any ethical principle whatever; and the more we look about us, the less likely are we to adopt a false one’ (*P.E.*, p. 20).

In Chapters II–IV Moore argues against several naturalistic theories, ‘theories which offer us an answer to the question What is good in itself?’ All his arguments centre around *the* good, that which is good, and not around the simple unanalysable object called ‘good’.

In the last Chapter of the *Principia* Moore offers us his own answer to the question what *the* good is, what is that for the sake of which we ought to perform our actions, if those actions are to be moral.

‘No one, probably, who has asked himself the question, has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art and Nature, are good in themselves . . .’ But ‘what has *not* been recognized is that it is the ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy. That it is only for the sake of these things . . . that any one can be justified in performing any public or private duty; that they are the *raison d’etre* of virtue . . . the rational ultimate end of human action and the sole criterion of social progress: these appear to be truths which have been generally overlooked’ *P.E.*, pp. 188–189).